

## LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

October 27, 1997

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## LAST WEEK:

### **AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS INCLUDED IN SECOND CONTINUING RESOLUTION**

- Congress included Agriculture Appropriations in a second continuing resolution, H.J. Res. 97, which extends funding from October 23 through November 7. The Senate did not take action during the week on approving the conference report, H.Rpt. 105-252, which is the last step in passage of the FY98 Agricultural Appropriations. This made it necessary to include Ag. Approps in another continuing resolution. The Senate will likely pass the report soon. It is not expected that Agriculture will be included in any long-term continuing resolution, should one be needed.

### **USDA ACCOUNTABILITY, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND REORGANIZATION**

- On Thursday, the Secretary of Agriculture testified before the House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Bob Smith, R-OR). The hearing focused on a bill introduced by Eva Clayton (D-NC), H.R. 2185, a bill to establish equitable service for customers and equal opportunity for employees of the Department of Agriculture. Chairman Smith also requested testimony on his bill, H.R. 2692, which was formally introduced the evening before the hearing. H.R. 2692 proposes to combine the Consolidated Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service under an Under Secretary of Agriculture for Foreign Agriculture and Agricultural Field Services. The legislation also addresses the issue of civil rights at USDA.

In his testimony, the Secretary stated strongly that revisiting USDA organizational structure is inappropriate at this time. The Secretary complimented both NRCS and FSA for the good work the agencies have done to implement the 1996 Farm Bill Programs. He asserted that a merger would be disruptive to USDA activities and that farmers and ranchers need both a strong NRCS and FSA. The Secretary said, "They perform critical and unique functions which I don't think should be mashed together".

Representative Bill Barrett (R-NE) asked how future appropriation levels would impact the agencies. Secretary Glickman replied that administrative convergence is set in motion to try to prepare for shrinking budgets. He said that the intent is to reduce duplication and spending in administrative areas in order to free up resources and funds to be applied to direct program assistance. The Secretary added that NRCS is a technical organization that partners closely with Districts, while FSA administers farm program and farm lending programs. This key difference was identified as a key reason why the agencies shouldn't be merged.

Representative Tom Ewing (R-IL) asked how Soil and Water Conservation Districts could work with a merged agency. The Secretary stated that the existing Conservation Partnership is extraordinary. He underlined the unique benefits that are provided by Districts and how resources and personnel are shared. He concluded that H.R. 2692 does not address how the partnership might be affected.

Gerald Vap, of the National Association of Conservation Districts (also representing the National Association of State Conservation Agencies) stated that the issue

of Civil Rights is of such importance that it should be addressed in a forum of its own. He said that it is inappropriate for the two issues to be included in one piece of legislation. He also said that the reorganization of 1994 should be allowed to work its course.

Other witnesses also included:

Mr. Kenneth Hood, President, National Association of Farmer-Elected Committeemen  
Mr. Lawrence Lucas, President, USDA Coalition of Minority Employees  
Ms. Millie Turner, President, National Association of Credit Specialists  
Mr. Dan Sundseth, President, National Association of FSA Committee Employees  
Ms. Lorette Picciano, Executive Director, Rural Coalition  
Mr. Gary Grant, President, Black Farmers Association  
Mr. John Boyd, President, National Black farmers Association  
Mr. Phil Givens, Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma

### **HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE PASSES MEASURE TO BLOCK AMERICAN HERITAGE RIVERS**

- On Wednesday, the House Resources Committee passed H.R. 1842 out of committee in a 15-8 vote. The measure now goes to the floor for House for consideration. This bill, sponsored by Helen Chenoweth (R-ID), would prohibit the designation of rivers under the Presidential American Heritage Rivers initiative. Ms. Chenoweth states that the initiative would impose federal designations on state waters and private property.

**FLOOD CONTROL AT DEVILS LAKE** - The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman John Chafee, R-R.I.) held a hearing Thursday on the Army Corps of Engineers' flood control plan at Devils Lake, North Dakota. Chairman Chafee opened the meeting by noting that Devils Lake is one of only two closed basins in North America. He underlined the fact that since the low-lying land has no natural outlet, it is alarming that the level of the lake has risen over 20 feet in recent years. The Chairman outlined the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' plan to periodically drain excess water from the basin into the Sheyenne and Red Rivers. He also noted that while funding for the project was requested by the President, Congress neglected to provide funding in the FY'97 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) said that the situation has become an emergency and that the federal government must implement the Corps' project to avoid future emergency measures. He also noted that in the six counties within the Devils Lake Basin, over 430,000 acres are enrolled in the conservation reserve program (CRP). Much of these CRP acres were further noted to be under water or saturated, thereby effectively serving as water storage areas.

John H. Zirschky, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works said that a great many resources of Federal, state, and local governments have been committed to address these flooding problems. He said that construction, design, and study efforts are underway to address problems and insure that the government is poised to respond quickly to changes in the lake's level. Dave Sprynczynatyk, Engineer for the State of North Dakota, said that while many have mistakenly assumed that the basin should drain to the south, the natural outlet for the water is actually Hudson Bay. As a result, he asserted, the Army Corps of Engineers project should be implemented.

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**THIS WEEK:**

**AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS AWAIT FINAL PASSAGE** - The last step in passage of the FY98 Agricultural Appropriations is Senate approval of the conference report. The Senate will likely pass the report soon, and could occur this week.

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**LOOKING AHEAD:**

**EQIP HEARING** - The House Agriculture Subcommittee on Forestry, Resource Conservation, and Research (Chairman Larry Combest R-TX) will hold an oversight hearing on the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Nov. 4                      9:30 a.m.                                      1300 Longworth

**TARGET ADJOURNMENT DATE FOR 1st SESSION** - Congressional leaders continue to discuss potential adjournment dates for the end of the first session of the 105th Congress. The first published schedules for the session listed November 14th as the target date. At this time, however, the general consensus appears that November 7 is the target for adjournment. The 2nd session of 105th Congress will begin in January, 1998.

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